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FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE MOURNS THE LOSS OF JAMES ASHFORD, FST EMPLOYEE OF OVER 20 YEARS

(Sarasota, FL) – **Florida Studio Theatre** (FST) is saddened to announce the passing of **James Ashford**, who started out as an Acting Apprentice and went on to become FST’s Coordinator of Casting and Hiring. During the 21 years that Ashford was a part of FST, he worked with the theatre’s WRITE A PLAY program, served as the Assistant to the Artistic Director, and cast shows for over 12 Seasons.

“James worked at FST for more than two decades and contributed his heart and soul to the theatre,” said **Richard Hopkins**, FST’s Producing Artistic Director. “We are grateful for his significant and invaluable contributions to the growth of FST. We are deeply saddened to learn of his passing.”

“I was very fond of James from the early days when I worked with him as an acting intern, appearing in *James and the Giant Peach*,” said **Kate Alexander**, FST’s Associate Director At-Large and Founder of the theatre’s WRITE A PLAY program. “Even back then, it was clear that he was so intelligent, inquisitive, sensitive and kind. He found an artistic home here at FST and we all grew—as people and as leaders of a theatre—together. He really found his stride as the Casting Coordinator, working with agents, actors, and contributing to the artistic process. He had a unique gift of helping actors know and feel that they were part of something larger, that they were essential to FST’s mission.”

During his tenure as FST’s Coordinator of Casting and Hiring, Ashford was responsible for finding the casts and design teams for many significant readings and productions, from *Metamorphoses* (2005) and *Shear Madness* (2011) to Monty Python’s *Spamalot* (2014) to *Bright Star* (2020).

“James and I both started our careers at about the same time. And we both found a family at FST in those early years,” said Jeffrey Plunkett, an actor who has performed in a dozen FST productions. “He went on to build a national reputation certainly for his ethic and professionalism, but uniquely coupled with a genuine kindness he offered without reservation, his warm smile flooding the recesses of his extraordinary memory, casting light on the thousands of actors he’d cultivate in a body of work driven by one of the greatest passions for the theatre I’ve ever encountered. I will miss him terribly.”

James Ashford is survived by the Ashford family and his large FST family.

ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Florida Studio Theatre (FST) is Sarasota's contemporary theatre. Founded in 1973, FST has grown to a village of five theatres located in the heart of Downtown, Sarasota. Each theatre is small in size and large in impact— providing intimate and engaging settings for high-quality, professional performances.

Today, FST has established itself as a major force in American Theatre. FST is the largest subscription theatre in the state of Florida and among the largest in the country, serving more than 230,000 live attendees each year across its six core programs: Mainstage, Cabaret, Stage III, Children's Theatre, Education, and New Play Development.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to as many people as possible. Under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Richard Hopkins, FST develops theatre that speaks to our living, evolving, and dynamically changing world. Hip and historical, entertaining and challenging, we are the theatre where the street meets the elite — where everyone is welcome to engage in the art of theatre.

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